

**CHINESE SPIRIT MEDIUMSHIP : AN
EXPLORATORY STUDY IN KUALA LUMPUR**

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Latihan Ilmiah

Bagi Memenuhi Sebahagian Daripada

Syarat-syarat Untuk Ijazah

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Universiti Malaya

Kuala Lumpur

Sessi 1984/85

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research was made possible in no small way through the invaluable help and guidance of many people. Their opinions, criticism and encouragement were deeply appreciated. My gratitude is extended to:-

- Dr. Raymond Lee, my supervisor who inspire my interest in Chinese Spirit Mediumship and whose invaluable comments and patience helped see me through this graduation exercise.
- Mr Tang Eng Teik who transcribed the Chinese Characters for this graduation exercise.
- Mr Robert Chooi from The Nan Tien Men Temple for making my visits to the temple welcomed.
- Mr Jeremy Lim from New Thrills for consenting to reprints of his photographs of a soulraise.
- My sister Lay Hoon who found time in between her busy schedule to type this graduation exercise.
- My coursemate Beng Choo who accompanied me on numerous occasions to the temples.
- Last but not least, the Dangkis and Soulraisers, friends and informants who provided invaluable information.

To them all, I am sincerely grateful.

SYNOPSIS

Chinese Spirit Mediumship is an intricate part of the Chinese religious system. A Chinese Religionist would at one time or other had something to do with spirit mediumship. Thus, a study in this aspect may help enhance better understanding in the structure and organization of the Chinese Religion.

This graduation exercise seeks to explore the practices of Chinese Spirit Mediums focusing on specific branches i.e. temple mediums and soulraisers.

Chapter Two dealt with two concepts i.e. Shen and Gui, explaining the Chinese' basic beliefs regarding divinity, life and death (Heaven, Earth and Underworld).

Chapter Three and Four are mainly descriptions of the practices of two temple mediums (known as Dangkis) and two soulraisers. It includes discussion of their functions, organizations, the trance phenomenon and other details such as the mediums' personal background and clientele.

In Chapter Five, a brief comparison between the two groups of mediums is made. The nature of Chinese Spirit Mediumship is touched upon, bringing to light its few distinct characteristics. In conclusion, we ponder over the popularity or decline of the Chinese Spirit Mediumship in local environment.

Dalam Bab Lima, kita mendapati suatu perbandingan antara dua golongan tersebut. Selanjutnya, kesediaan menyediakan Analisis Mengenai Orang-orang Cina akan dilanjutkan dengan menggunakan beberapa ciri-ciri utamanya. Sebagai kesimpulan, kita memusatkan tentang kejayaan pelantikan dan kerendahan Analisis Mengenai Orang-orang Cina pada masa kini di negara kita Malaysia.

Sinopsis

Amalan menurun orang-orang Cina merupakan suatu bahagian yang penting daripada sistem kepercayaan mereka. Seseorang pengarut Ugama Cina akan melibatkan diri dalam Amalan Menurun ini pada satu-satu masa tertentu. Maka, satu kajian dalam aspek Ugama Cina ini boleh sedikit-sebanyaknya membantu menjelaskan secara lebih mendalam mengenai struktur dan organisasi Ugama Cina pada keseluruhannya.

Latihan ilmiah ini adalah menumpukan perhatian keatas Amalan Menurun orang-orang Cina. Ia mengkaji dua golongan yang terlibat dalam amalan tersebut iaitu Dangkis dan Soulraisers.

Bab Dua adalah mengenai dua konsep iaitu konsep Shen dan Gui yang dapat menerangkan tentang kepercayaan orang-orang Cina kepada konsep Syurga, Dunia dan Neraka. Tanpa konsep-konsep ini, Amalan Menurun memang tidak akan wujud.

Bab Tiga dan Empat pula merupakan penerangan mengenai amalan-amalan menurun masing-masing. Ini termasuk penjelasan atas fungsi, organisasi, latar-belakang dan pelanggan-pelanggan kedua-dua golongan pengamal menurun tadi iaitu Dangkis dan Soulraisers.

Dalam Bab Lima, kita membuat suatu perbandingan antara dua golongan tersebut. Seterusnya, keadaan semulajadi Amalan Menurun Orang-orang Cina dibincangkan dengan mengemukakan beberapa ciri-ciri utamanya. Sebagai kesimpulan, kita memerihai tentang kejayaan pelanjutan dan keruntuhan Amalan Menurun Orang-orang Cina pada masa kini dinegara kita Malaysia.

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1.1 Aims of Research

Even though many aspects of the Chinese Religion had been adapted to the local environment, the religious practices of today remain distinctly Chinese. Chinese Spirit Mediumship is part of the Chinese Religion or at least is associated with Chinese religious practices. Thus, this exercise hopes to identify this important aspect of Chinese religious practices and to relate it to the Chinese society in Malaysia.

According to A. J. A. Elliott (1955), the underlying assumption of Chinese Spirit Mediumship is that a spiritual being of vast and undefined powers possesses the body of a human medium and enables her to inflict injury upon himself without feeling pain and to speak with divine wisdom, giving advice to worshippers.

CHAPTER ONE

CHINESE SPIRIT MEDIUMSHIP - AN EXPLORATORY STUDY IN KUALA LUMPUR

INTRODUCTION:-

It is generally known to Chinese and Non-Chinese alike that the Chinese Religion comprises three main groups namely Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism. However, through the process of assimilation and acculturation, the great mass of immigrant Chinese made little distinctions between the three. Some admit that they belong to all three while others openly declare that they belong to none of them. In Malaysia, many Chinese are classified as Buddhist in their official documents. In actual practice, they may be devotees of any religion or cult but Buddhism. As such, the aim of this study is to explore the various branches of the Chinese Religion and to focus on one, viz Spirit Mediumship. Little has been done on this aspect of the Chinese Religion in Malaysia though it is an outstanding characteristic of Chinese religious beliefs and practices.

1.1 Aims of Research

Even though many aspects of the Chinese Religion had been adapted to the local environment, the religious practices of today remain distinctly Chinese. Chinese Spirit Mediumship is part of the Chinese Religion or at least is associated with Chinese religious practices. Thus, this exercise hopes to identify this important aspect of Chinese religious practices and to relate it to the Chinese society in Malaysia.

According to A J A Elliott (1955), the underlying assumption of Chinese

Spirit Mediumship is that a spiritual being of vast and undefined powers possesses the body of a human medium and enables him to inflict injury upon himself or others. These mediums were either friends of the deceased or those who, without feeling pain and to speak with divine wisdom, giving advice to worshippers of the deceased. They were the very who introduced the writer to the

and curing their illness. This definition however, appears to be appropriate only in describing temple mediums whose bodies are 'borrowed' by deities to communicate with their worshippers. There is another group of mediums call Soul-raisers, who are not possessed specifically by deities but by the souls of the deads, enabling them to communicate with their living relatives.

It is interesting to note the difference in their functions. The Soul-raisers are a group of mediums who modestly make no claim of possession by any deities. Their only reference to a deity is the Honourable Goddess of Mercy or Guānyīn (观音) as she is popularly known, who acts only as an intermediate link for the dead and the living. Guānyīn is said to help in seaching for the souls in the Underworld.

This reseach paper involves describing the activities and functions of the two groups of mediums i.e temple mediums and soul-raisers. In discussing their roles, the writer hopes to identify the reason pertaining to the fact that each field is dominated by mediums of different sex i.e soul-raisers are mainly women while temple mediums tend to be males. It is the aim here, to attempt to provide an idea of the relationship that exists between the mediums and their clients. It is also hoped that readers can gain an insight into the factors that draw clients to consult these mediums. The mediums' purposes of pursuing this line of occupation is also explored. The approach adopted here is one that compares the functions and practices of the two groups of mediums.

1.2 Methods Of Research

The methods employed to carry out this reseach includes collecting data from informants. These informants were either friends of the mediums or those who know of the mediums. They were the ones who introduced the writer to the

mediums operating in Kuala Lumpur. The four mediums who were studied (two of whom are temple mediums and the other two, soul-raisers) were chosen on the grounds that they operated in the metropolitan area of Kuala Lumpur, were familiar with the writer's informants and were popular with their clientele i.e. have good reputations as mediums. Since Kuala Lumpur was predominantly Chinese, spirit medium activities are common.

Casual interviews proved to be most resourceful. Mediums, their assistants and clients were interviewed in a casual manner rather than formal interviews with questionnaires as that would discourage respondents from answering. Thus, through casual conversation many of the valuable information were gathered. Questions asked were those regarding historical and personal backgrounds of the mediums and their tutelary deities as well as those concerning religion of the Chinese.

In cases where mediums were reluctant to volunteers the information required, their assistants were sought out. Information gathered from these assistants were most valuable as they sometimes disclosed facts let out intentionally by the mediums themselves. At times information gathered from them were used to check the validity of the information volunteered by the mediums.

The method of participation observation was not used in the actual sense where a researcher was required to live among the subjects studied, for a long period of time. Instead, the writer (together with an aunt) had requested the service of a soul-raiser studied, to contact her deceased grandmother. Friends were also taken to consult these mediums, to enable a closer 'look' at their practices.

The most important method employed was observation. It was through the

many sessions of seances and trance performed by the mediums that a clear picture of their practices were obtained. Being on the scene for numerous occasions enabled familiarization with the mediums, their assistants and clients who were later more willing to contribute invaluable data for this study. Special attention was paid to the following aspects during observation:

1. the medium's preparation for the trance.
2. the reactions of the medium to the questions put forward by the clients.
3. the behaviour of the clients throughout the seance.

A few photographs were taken with the permission of the mediums. Temple mediums were more willing to be photographed compared to soul-raisers.

Religion, cults and soceries are considered sensitive issues and as such, rigid methods (such as questionnaires) would be deemed unsuitable. The mediums needed to be persuaded into disclosing information and methods used should not invoked hostility. Bearing these factors in mind, the above methods were selected for this study.

1.3 Problems in Research

An outstanding problem faced here was the difficulty of locating respondents. There may be many temples in Kuala Lumpur but only a few employ the services of mediums. On top of that, soul-raisers who operate outside the confines of temples prove more difficult to contact. Soul-raising is not very prevalent today as the young generation regards it with fear, contempt and ignorance. Out of the few soul-raisers operating in Kuala Lumpur, two of them had stopped their practices.

Many temple mediums worked part time. They hold jobs in the day and work as mediums in the night. To avoid inconvenience on their part, appoint-

ments to meet them can only be arranged late in the night after their 'stint' at the temples. Before their session began, they were usually too busy preparing for the trance to speak to researchers.

At times the mediums or their assistants were hostile. The soul-raisers were most reluctant to discuss their practices. Initially one of them even told the writer to leave the subject alone. At a temple, an assistant of the medium was not happy to see the writer there so often that he warned his colleagues to ignore her. Fortunately the medium himself was cooperative and helpful.

Though there are some writing on the subject of Chinese Religion and Spirit Mediumship, little had been written on the practices in Malaysia. Most writers focused their attention on countries which have a larger Chinese community. As examples, De Groot (1892 to 1910, 6 volumes) based his work on researches carried out in Amoy, mainland China. Jack Potter (1974) wrote on Cantonese Shamanism in Hong Kong's New Territories. In Taiwan, Emily Ahern (1973) wrote on cults of the dead while David Jordan (1972) examined the relationship between Gods, Ghosts and Ancestors. Other examples include A J A Elliott (1955) and Leon Camber (1958) who published their work on Chinese mediumship in Singapore.

A minor problem faced was that limited knowledge of the Chinese language prevented the writer from gaining a better insight into Spirit Mediumship through texts and scriptures offered by various temples.

CHAPTER TWO

CHINESE SPIRIT MEDIUMSHIP - A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Religion is that part of culture composed of shared beliefs and practices identifying the relationship between man and the supernatural. In every culture, there is an elaborate set of beliefs providing answers to the 'why' questions on life, fulfilling what Malinowsky called the 'explanatory function' of religion.

The Chinese has a complex religions system based on traditional beliefs. It is these beliefs that provide them with moral definition as to what is good (in harmony with) and approved by the supernatural and what is bad (out of harmony with) and contrary to the supernatural - (Glenn Vernon:1962).

2.1 The Religion Of the Chinese

The religion of the Chinese has been describe as folk religion (Camber 1958) and religion of the masses (Topley 1956). It is not distinctively Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism nor just ancient cult but a combination of all of them. The Chinese uses ancient cult as its basic and elements from the other three as secondary features¹. They believed in and worship a plurality of inferior deities of various grades subordinate to the supreme GOD.

Basically the religion of the Chinese stemmed from the belief that nature of existence is divided into 3 planes i.e Heaven (Tiēn 天), Earth (Tì 地) and Underworld (Míng 冥) [Wong Keng Chun 1983]. The dominant religions belief was in these 3 planes which represent a hierarchy of supernatural beings possessing the power to determine the fate of everyone on the basis of his moral conduct.

Heaven is the omnipotent force overwhelming the universal course of life (C K Yang 1961). It is in Heaven that lies the power to react to man's action

either in terms of rewards or punishment so as to maintain a state of harmony between the world of man and the world of supernatural. Owing to this belief, Chinese households usually have altars fixed onto the exterior of their houses, to worship and pacify Tiên Gōng (天公).²

The Monarch in Heaven is said to be the Jade Emperor. This imperial court consists of gods of the stars as well as high deities of Buddhist and Taoist creations. Subordinate administrators under the heavenly court were the spirits immanent in the natural elements of the earth such as mountains and rivers. The complex system of authorities of the Underworld also serve as subordinate to the Monarch of Heaven.

The Underworld is a form of confirmation to the living of the reality of continual existence of the soul. All dead souls will pass through Nai Ho Chiao (The Bridge Of Sighs or The Bridge Of The Only Alternative) which is a bridge separating the world of living from that of death. It was believed that the spirits of the dead could take a last long look at the world of the living from this bridge. Sometimes the souls would linger on the bridge for a while, hoping to return to the world of living for one final visit. This visit takes place twenty one days after burial. Incidentally, after a burial rite, the living relatives are supposed to cry aloud (on the way home from the cemetery) asking the dead to cross the bridge and return home for a visit.

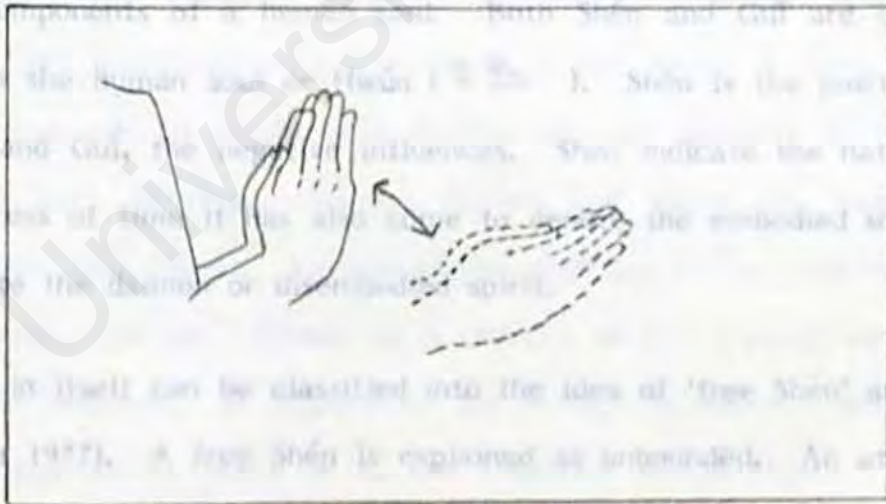
The dead soul will have to pass through ten courts of judgement called Yamen or Ten Courts Of Hell in the Underworld. It is here where the sinful are punished and the saintful allowed to pass through. This is the most torturous part of the journey through the Underworld before the spirit can reach its happy

destination of West Heaven (Western Paradise). It is said that incense paper are burnt in large quantities during the funeral rite because it can be used to bribe the officers of Yamen to lighten any punishment. (Incense papers are considered a medium of exchange in the Underworld. Only recently, Hell Bank notes are introduced into the market).

2.2 Shén and Guǐ

Bài-Shén (拜神)

The most prevalent form of Chinese Religion is Shenism (Elliott 1955:29) or Shén Jiao (Wee, Vivien 1976:170) meaning 'doctrin of the gods'. The believe in Shenism forms the basis for spirit medium activities. Among the Chinese, Bài-Shén is a common phrase use by those who worship a god. Bài more specifically refers to the action of praying. Chinese adopt a praying manner whereby palms are put together in front of the body moving the palm away and towards the chest.



A sketch of the action Bai

Shén not only refers to God but include spiritual beings that possess supernatural powers. The word 'Shén' can be used to denote singularity or plurality. To bài-shén actually mean to pray or worship these spiritual beings in order to

secure one's well-being. The process of *bāi* can be done on an individual basis or in groups. Where the rituals are held on a big scale, then group *bài-shén* is preferred. At these group *bài-shén*, mediums are employed for their ritualistic practices. In ancient China, practices by mediums or diviners, so-called 'Wu-ism' (De Groot Vol 6: 1910). These Wu-ist priests are employed for animistic practices. The belief in Shenism among the Chinese arises from a variety of folk beliefs which they deeply entrenched. These deep lying beliefs are a heritage from an ancient peasant part and had animated the religious life of the Chinese. These animistic beliefs revolve around the belief in an immense number of beneficent spirits called *Shén* and maleficent spirits called *Guǐ*.³

Shén is a popular term for deities or spirits. It has a divine indication. In a broader sense, it denotes the whole lot of divine beings. Contrary to *Shén* is *Guǐ*. It is generic term for ghosts but in actual fact *Guǐ* are the negative components of a human soul. Both *Shén* and *Guǐ* are closely associated with the human soul or *Hwún* (魂魄). *Shén* is the positive spiritual influences and *Guǐ*, the negative influences. *Shén* indicate the nature spirits. In the process of time it has also come to denote the embodied soul of man. *Guǐ*, indicate the daimon or disembodied spirit.

Shén in itself can be classified into the idea of 'free *Shén*' and 'attached *Shén*' (Wee: 1977). A free *Shén* is explained as unbounded. An attached *Shén* is said to be bounded by the material object in which it exists. *Shén* which are represented in image or pictures are free *Shén*. Since they are unbounded they have to be bounded at least partially in material objects before they could be worshipped. Contrary to that, attached *Shén* need not be represented

De Groot (1970) interestingly noted that the oldest and holiest books of

by images as they are already bounded. Examples are **Tǔdìgōng** and **Dìzhǔgōng** (the Landlord God) who are attached Shen of specific areas. These two Shen are not represented by images but rather by pieces of framed red paper with Chinese characters and are always placed on the ground.

Other than the concept of Shen and Guǐ, there are also complements of the soul called 'P'oh' or anima and 'Hwun' or animus. The soul has 10 parts where Hwun was subdivided into 3 parts and the P'oh into 7 parts. If the deceased is properly buried, the P'oh returns to the Earth and ceases to exist.

On the other hand if improperly buried, the P'oh becomes a dangerous malignant demon, capable of any harm.

The Shen part of the soul i.e. the animus is the sensual part. It is also the intellectual, spiritual and moral part of the soul and is known as **Líng-hwún** (灵 魂). Some Chinese believe that after a death, the Líng-hwún continue life in the 'World of Shades' (阴 间), a ghostly sphere, invisible to mortals yet interpenetrating the world of the living in time and space. Their existence can be comfortable if they are well provided by their descendants with food offerings, clothing, houses and above all, money (incense papers or hell bank notes). Sometimes the dead has no descendants to provide him with such offerings. Slowly he is reduced to dire poverty and becomes a most pitiable creature. In desperation and in rage he attacks human beings to gain fulfilment of his needs or to win attention to his plight. In attacking human beings he changes categories from a Líng-hwún to a Guǐ (David Jordan 1972).

2.1 Yin Yang

De Groot (1910) interestingly noted that the oldest and holiest books of

the empire teach that the Universe consists of 2 souls or breaths called Yin (阴) and Yang (阳). Yang represent light, warm, productivity and life. It also refers to the heaven from which all good things emate. Yang is then subdivided into indefinite numbers of good spirits call Shén. Yin represents darkness, cold, death and earth. Yin is also subdivided but unlike the good spirits in Yang, it comprises of evil spirits call Guǐ. Guǐ may not be totally evil but are often regard as dangerous. Should there be any harm to human being it is always Guǐ who is accused. As such, measures are taken to exorcise them. Shén on the other hand, do not actually harm human beings but may bring discomfort to a person (in terms of illness,) if offended. However, Shén is always willing to rectify the situation if the victim seeks forgiveness. To top it all, Shén is believed to have the power to deal with Guǐ. Shén invoke respect and security while Guǐ invoke fear and insecurity. Man made offerings to Shén out of respect especially on a deity's birthday. Offerings of food are made to Guǐ as well but more because of fear than respect or gratitude. As an example, during the 7th month of the lunar calendar on the 'Festival Of The Hungry Ghosts', food offerings are widely made. On this month, the gates of Hell are open and spirits who have no descendants to care for their well-being are allowed to escape for a respite on earth. Many Chinese families offer great quantities of food and paper money to these wandering and hungry ghosts in hopes of appeasing them and driving them away. Usually, in the middle of the month each household is expected to hold a ceremony on the roadside outside its home at which incense papers and joss sticks are burnt. At many predominantly Chinese area such as Ipoh Road (3rd Mile) and Setapak, a mass ceremony is held (usually organized by a temple). At Ipoh Road, about 100 wooden shelters are set up along the road. Residents

worshipped on the household altars). To drive out the Guǐ, normally the of that area and neighbouring areas participate in the ceremony. An opera Chinese stick charm papers on doors as a warning from the Shén (whom they company is hired to perform, increasing the popularity of such festivals. These consulted through a damper and obtained the charm papers) so as not to stir up wandering ghosts are referred to by a common euphemism - the Good Brethren (好兄弟). These red or yellow charm papers are given out in threes to (女子兄弟). This has indication that ghosts are on the same level or plane as stick in a horizontal position on or above the front door of a house. Such man. Shén are of a higher plane and are referred to by the euphemism - doings imply that Guǐ are actually afraid of Shén, that evils are always Gōng (公). Put on the same plane, Guǐ clearly represent the less refined overpowered by the good. qualities of man. They represent human passion and vices. Shén represent his intellect and finer part of his characters, his virtues. that there is an extremely

influential spiritual world with a multitude of powerful and fearsome Birth is said to consist of an infusion of these souls i.e. Shén and Guǐ. In inhabitants who are apart from the human world but in close relation to it, meeting death the Shén will return to the heaven or Yang while the Guǐ The belief in Shén and Guǐ give rise to spirit medium activities. Those return to earth or Yin. In many Chinese households, wooden tablets are found inhabitants of the 'otherworld' of spirits are strongly anthropomorphic and or potraits are set up on their altars to commemorate the dead. These dead their modes of behaviour are firmly patterned on human activities and the ancestors are not regarded as Guǐ as they were members of the family and features of man are largely controlled by the working of Shén and by a slight do not invoke fear nor are they expected to bring harm to their own families. propitiation of the more powerful among them (Elliott 1955: 27, 29). The

Thus, the Líng-hwún with descendants to see to its welfare is an ancestor religious behaviour pattern develop by man in accordance with his beliefs in (祖先) and not Guǐ (鬼). Shén, in a manner he thinks that harmonizes with the wishes of Shén.

There is a continuity between Guǐ and Shén. Shén is conceived to Shén can manifest itself in many places simultaneously. Chinese households occupy an enviable position as an official in a celestial hierarchy. Guǐ is and temples have the images of common Shén. An altar or shrine can be set deprived of such honour, spend his days in misery and dark doings. Man up in any place (such as under a tree at the roadside or in the garden) as long figured that Shén, on its higher plane has greater power over Guǐ. Shén are as it is believed that a Shén is present. Food offerings are made at altars to seen as positive spiritual forces and it is natural then, to worship them. Guǐ the Shén who may in return, communicate with the worshippers. Communion are the negative spiritual forces and it is hoped that they are driven out ration is carried out in various ways such as through a medium, divination instead. Since ancestors are not viewed as Guǐ they are sometimes worshipped. blocks and casting lots. It is usually temples that engaged the services of a (Normally tablets of ancestors are placed to the right side of the main deity medium.

worshipped on the household altars). To drive out the Guǐ, normally the Chinese stick charm papers on doors as a warning from the Shén (whom they consulted through a dangki and obtained the charm papers) so as not to stir up any disturbances. These red or yellow charm papers are given out in threes to stick in a horizontal position on or above the front door of a house. Such doings imply that Guǐ are actually afraid of Shén, that evils are always overpowered by the good.

The practice of Shenism is based on the belief that there is an extremely influential spiritual world with a limitless number of powerful and fearsome inhabitants who are apart from the human world but in close relation to it. The belief in Shén and Guǐ give rise to spirit medium activities. Those inhabitants of the 'otherworld' of spirits are strongly anthropomorphic and their modes of behaviour are firmly patterned on human activities and the features of man are largely controlled by the working of Shén and by a right propitiation of the more powerful among them (Elliott 1955: 27, 29). The religious behaviour pattern is developed by man in accordance with his beliefs in Shén, in a manner he thinks that harmonizes with the wishes of Shén.

Shén can manifest itself in many places simultaneously. Chinese households and temples have the images of common Shén. An altar or shrine can be set up in any place (such as under a tree at the roadside or in the garden) as long as it is believed that a Shén is present. Food offerings are made at altars to the Shén who may in return, communicate with the worshippers. Communication is carried out in various ways such as through a medium, divination blocks and casting lots. It is usually temples that engaged the services of a medium.

2.3 Spirit Mediumship:- Spirit Mediumship is the temporary possession of a man

or women by a Shén. It is a way of obtaining advice and solution to problems from the Shen. A spirit medium's function is to lend his body to the Shen to communicate with the worshippers. When a Shén possess a medium, the medium will go into a trance and part of his soul is displaced temporarily and guarded by other Shen.

A spirit medium is referred to as a dangki (乩童) or 'child diviner or divine youth'. Through the grace of Shen, their lives will be prolonged if they serve as dangki. If a person has been chosen as a dangki there is no escape for him. Then Shén will persist in the matter until eventually the chosen person agrees to become a dangki.

2.3.1 Dangki

A dangki can be selected by Shén or on a voluntary basis, studies to be one. There are instances where a person go in trance with the help from other experienced dangki. The process of going into a trance is known as 'Loh Dang' (落僮). It is easier to enter a trance when the dangki has observe certain regulations. It would be more effective if a dangki fast or feed on vegetarian food, places himself in a pure state of mind and has total faith. To achieve that, he will have to forgo smoking, drinking of alcohol, womanising etc. A dangki must also be rid of any intention of personal gain through his practices. He must beware that indulging in evil doings and misusing his 'talent/power' would bring harm upon himself and his family.

A new dangki may take more than one attempt to be initiated and possessed. In theory, a dangki can go into a trance at any time and place without having to invoke the Shén. In practice, this usually happens in

temples where the dangki has the intention of calling down the Shen (from the celestial plane of Heaven or Tiē (天) to Earth or Tì (土) by invocation called zhòu (咒).

Dangki who are either selected by a Shen or volunteered, are usually those who have almost invariably been associated with the practice of spirit-mediumship since an early age. They have been familiarized with spiritmedium cults either because of their family background (a family that visit temples frequently) or are from the neighbourhood of the temple they are now serving.

Elliott has divided the development of a dangki into four stages before reaching full maturity:-

Stage 1 - when he is able to carry out feets of self-mortification without showing pain or fear.

Stage 2 - when a dangki show signs of possession by an identifiable Shen.

Stage 3 - when he is able to dispense medicine and advice to worshippers.

This stage represent the most popular type of manifestation among the worshippers. It also represent spiritmediumship in Malaysia.

Stage 4 - this is an advance stage which few dangki attain. It involves the study of the accult under an accredited master or initiation into a brotherhood of experts.

Since stage 3 represents spiritmediumship in Malaysia, we would define the relationship between man and Shen as a patron-client relationship through the service of a dangki.

2.3.2 Types of dangki

Though anyone of any sex, age, social and economic background etc can

become a dangki, there seem to be a greater number of male dangki in practice when compared to female dangki. Of the few women dangki available, majority of them are middle aged women. Women dangki are usually mediums for a female tutelage deity such as Guānyīn and Hōr Sīn Gū. It is rare for a male dangki to be possessed by a female deity. Likewise, very rarely do women dangki serve as mediums to male deities. Apparently male deities prefer male dangki because women are considered not always as 'pure' as men. It has been a custom that menstruating and pregnant women are prohibited from entering a temple or participating in any religious rites.⁴

There are basically 2 types of dangki:-

1. a resident dangki who is employed on a fulltime basis. He usually serves as the temple keeper as well. His family would live in the temple building or any premises attached to the temple.
2. a part time dangki who holds a job elsewhere and serves as a dangki only at nights. Dangkis of this category are usually youths and have been recently initiated.

Some dangki are tutored by an experienced dangki while others learn through their own experience. Both formally trained or otherwise, a dangki needs to be initiated by a more experienced colleague who can invoke the Shen easily.

2.3.3 Branch of Mediumship

One popular group of mediums serving the Chinese society is the soulraisers. The practitioners of soulraising are not referred to as dangki but as Soulraisers or Mang Maei Poh (Elliott 1955), Mang Seng Poh (Jack Potter 1974) and Ang i

(De Groot 1910). All these terms refer to elderly women who raised the souls of the dead. According to a soulraiser interviewed, women dominate this branch of mediumship because they are more suitable. Their *Sí Wǎn* (時運) or luck is lower than males. As such, they are able to come in contact with residents of the Underworld. Soulraisers usually indulge in such practices after a tragic occurrence in her personal experience such as children's death or after a long illness. They are selected by a tutelage deity to serve as soulraisers.

This branch of mediumship differs vastly from temple dangkis. A soulraiser operates in private company, either in her own residence or the house of her client. People who seek consultations are not worshippers of any 'soul' but merely clients who are anxious to get in touch with their ancestors or dead relatives. Soulraising is the process where the soulraiser using information granted by client, tries to contact a particular sought soul and raised it to enable communication between the client and the sought soul. The soulraiser's own soul will be displaced temporary and her body is lent to the soul raised.

Soulraising is done not solely on the abilities of the soulraiser but through the assistance rendered by a tutelage deity who is normally *Guānyīn* (Goddess of Mercy) or *Tǔdìgōng* (God of Earth) or even through child spirits. *Tǔdìgōng* is said to have a special function i.e. to police the *Gui*. *Gui* who are creatures of the soil, spiritual residues of the most material part of man are associated with *Tǔdìgōng*. The 'little ghosts' (*Tóngzǐkú*) or child spirits are carried in small images or puppets concealed in the bosom or sleeve of a soulraiser. In Amoy a number of 'ang i' employed such a spirit for conducting seances. (De Groot 1910).

Guan yin who have access to the Gate of Hell, serves as a guide, searching for the sought soul in the Underworld and guiding him up to 'borrow' the body of a soulraiser to communicate with his living relatives. Soulraising is not the possession of Gui but of "Hwun".

During Cheng Beng and 7th Month of the lunar calender, soulraising is most popular. Souls are allowed to leave the Underworld for a visit to the Earth during these periods. It is easier to contact them during this time. Normally, after visiting a grave, the members of the deceased's family will visit a soulraiser, enquiring if the soul had received all offerings that were burnt for them at Cheng Beng. Cheng Beng and Festivals Of The Hungry Ghosts are very much part of Chinese tradition. Cheng Beng brings forth a sense of kinship and filial piety, all which constitute to the cultural background of a Chinese.

2.4 Roles of Spirit Mediumship in the Chinese Society

The Chinese profess that Shen and Gui exercise influence over their lives. To secure their well-being, they turn to various means of pacifying the Shen and Gui. They indulge in spirit mediumship to invoke the friendly aid of Shen in securing their well-being. Sometimes, it is for the pursuits of wealth. Mediums may also indulge in spirit medium practices as a mean of livelihood. Spirit medium practices are nearly always of the nature of enterprises where they (the mediums) provide services in return for a nominal fee.

Soulraising as a branch of mediumship is practised by families to ensure that no misfortunes fall upon them as descendants of the dead. It is to see that the soul of the dead are left in contentment and satisfaction so as not to change its form from 'Hwun' to Gui.

Notes Elliott (1955) explained that spirit mediumship are practised by immigrant Chinese because when they came to this part of the world, they had to endure hardships of all kinds. To date, they are still plagued by uncertainty in their lives. To them, spirit medium activities are ways of arriving at decisions and gaining emotional comfort. Nyce (1971) further supported that claim by expressing the view that the Chinese who came to this part of the world to make money did not have the security of the broader family and community as a kind of insurance should they fail. He stated that in worship, their concern was drawn more and more to the unorthodox act of spirit mediums. Spirit mediumship is said to provide confidence and hope to clients in matters of health, personal problems and wealth. Therefore, the belief of spirit mediumship has permeated into the socio-cultural life of the local Chinese and in some ways it is that which binds the Chinese together.

Chinese spirit mediumship as part of the Chinese religion regulates the spirit of social, cultural and religious commitments among the Chinese. Thus, it fortifies the existence of Chinese culture.

Notes to Chapter Two

1. In fact the religion of the Chinese is considered **syncretic** in nature. On writer, Chan Wing-tsit observed:

"The majority of China's millionsfollow a religion which combines and overshadows Buddhism, Taoism and the ancient cult. They do not follow three separate, parallel and conflicting religions at the same time but a syncretic religion embracing the ancient cult as its basis and Buddhist and Taoist elements as secondary features".

- Chan Wing-tsit, Religious Trends in Modern China, Columbia University Press, N.Y 1953 (p 141).

2. The Tiēn (天) or Heaven is believed to be the home of Tiēn Gōng (天公) and has immense power over the fate of man. The Hokkien speaking groups are ardent worshippers of him, considering him to be of greater importance than all other household deities.
3. The definition of Shen and Gui can be obtain in the introduction of Chinese Divination - An Ethnographic case by Choong Ket Che in 'Contributions To Southeast Asian Ethnography' No: 2, August 1983 - John R Clammer (ed).
4. A pregnant women in a temple where the dangki is in trance can damage herself and her unborn child. If the dangki is in the process of cutting himself as part of his performance, the presence of a pregnant woman near him may cause great difficulty in stopping the flow of blood. A menstruating woman holding joss sticks in the temple may find that her clothes will catch fire at one end. These two group of women are thought to be excellent target for the malice of evil spirits frequenting the outer fringe of the temple area. Nowadays these women are allowed into temples with permission from the Shen.

CHAPTER THREE

THE PRACTICES OF TWO TEMPLE SPIRIT MEDIUMS

Years ago, when Chinese immigrants arrived in Kuala Lumpur, they were concentrated in areas such as Petaling Street (Chinatown), Jalan Bandar, Ampang and Old Klang Road. Later, they moved to new townships such as Jinjang and Kepong. It was in these specific areas that they built shrines and temples for worshipping their 'shen'. Today, even as these areas became multiracial and many Chinese families moved away, those temples that were built remain.

The two temples studied were the Nán Tiēn Mén Temple (南天門) at Jalan Kolam Air in Sentul and the Tiēn Líng Gōng (天靈宮) at Jalan Kucing which is near Sentul area. These two areas were previously dominated by Chinese. Both the temples are spirit medium temples, i.e. there is a dangki who operates at the temple. These temples are characterized by a set of common equipment. The main difference is that they worship separate deities.

The Nán Tiēn Mén Temple pays special homage to the deity, Sāntàizǐ (三太子) as the 3rd Prince otherwise known as Názā (哪咤). At the Tiēn Líng Gōng Temple the main deity is Shèn Wáng Gōng (聖王公). Thus, the dangkis when in trance are possessed by their respective deities.

3.1 Organisation :-

Nán Tiēn Mén Temple - This is a formally organized temple. It is run by a Committee that was set up in September 1983. Prior to that it was the dangki himself who took charge of it. The Committee comprises a Chairman, Vice Chairman, Treasurer and two Secretaries (one responsible for the English section and the other, the Chinese section). It is the Committee that makes

the decisions regarding various matters such as the minimum fee for consultation, the sale of ritual paraphernalia (e.g. joss sticks and incense papers) and the usage of available funds.

The Committee meets every Tuesday nights. Owing to that, the temple is closed to the public on that night. However, on every first and fifteenth day of the Chinese Lunar Calendar, it is open in the mornings to cater for worshippers who has difficulties visiting the temple at night. The Committee members also act as assistants to the dangki. Though none of them are vegetarians, they have to abide by a set of regulations laid down by the deities. These regulations include no consumption of alcohol and no smoking in the temple. Womanising is also forbidden. They have to pledge to be honest and not indulge in matters (concerning the temple) pertaining to personal gains.

Tiēn Líng Gōng Temple – This temple is solely run by its resident dangki. It is part of a private residence, with a kitchen and two attached bedrooms. Since there is no proper book-keeping nor a Committee to make decisions, all proceeds and income are used according to the needs of the temple and the dangki's family. It can be classified as an informal organization.

3.2 The Location and Interior of the Temples :-

The two temples are small and simple in architecture. The Nán Tiēn Mén Temple is in better condition compared to the run-down image of the Tiēn Líng Gōng Temple. Like other Chinese temples they each has a high incense burner and wooden containers to hold joss sticks and candles in the compound. Hanging from the ceiling of the temples are coiled joss sticks.

A deity may object to the location of a temple. If that occurs, the dangki will be informed through dreams. He will then seek an alternative

location. The dangki at Nán Tiēn Mén Temple admitted to shifting his operation seven times owing to that reason. The Shen is said to be unhappy with a particular location because of the presence of evil spirits. Both the temples are occupying premises donated by generous worshippers.

The Nán Tiēn Mén Temple has an altar with the images of 3 prominent deities. They are Sāntàizǐ (The 3rd Prince), Tàshènyé (God of Wealth commonly known as the Monkey God) and Fàzǐgōng (famous for curing illnesses). This main altar is set up like a miniature house completed with yellow drapes and frills. In it are steps where the images of deities are placed according to their prominence. Tàshènyé occupies the highest level followed by Sāntàizǐ at the middle level and finally Fàzǐgōng at the bottom.

In front of this main altar is a smaller altar where all offerings of food are placed. There lies an urn to hold all lighted joss sticks. On the floor below the main altar is where the Túdìgōng (God of Earth) 'sits'. He is represented by a framed red piece of paper with Chinese characters written on it. A long table is arranged before the smaller altar, where the dangki places his apparatus for the trance. These apparatus are divination blocks, charm papers called fú (符), Chinese brush and ink, seals and a whip. The Dragon Seat, Lóngwèi (龍位) with carvings of a dragon's head at the edges of the arm rest is at the table too. The positions of these altars and table form a sort of terrace.

The various weapons and equipment are put on a rack which stands at the right-hand side of the temple. A few examples of the weapons are spears, flags, rings, swords etc. At the left-hand corner of the temple is yet another small altar (the third altar) where five different coloured flags stand.

Each flag is about two feet high. With these flags are five person-like images of well known 'Generals'. They are deities of War and act as guardians to the temple. In fact, they are found in all Taoist temples. Each General guards a cardinal point against evil spirits. North is represented by a general with black flag, South the red flag, East the green flag, West the white flag and finally the Center is represented by the yellow flag.

At the T'ien Ling Gong Temple, the altar for the 'Emperor' is not inside the temple but placed instead in the right-hand corner of the entrance. Inside the hall, the image of Shennanggong takes the major position to the main altar. Accompanying him are two smaller images of 'God of Wealth' and 'God of Prosperity'. Since there is only one altar in the temple, the long table and the dragon seat is arranged in front of it. The image of T'ien Gong (God of Earth) is as usual, placed below the main altar. To the right of the temple, against the wall, is the rack for the weapons of the deities. Next to it stands many flags measuring 3 feet by 1 foot. To the left of the temple are many high yee sticks of about 10 inches each. These are used only on special and auspicious occasions such as festivals. At the bottom of the temple, the Main Entrance is marked.

3.3 The Deities :-

The Shen worshipped in temples are represented by two forms i.e. by images and pictures. Images refer to statues resembling a deity. These are usually small and portable. Some of them are gifts from worshippers and grateful clients. Pictures refer to photographs and drawings of a deity. Sometimes a deity is represented by writings on red pieces of paper that are placed on the altar. A sketch of the interior of the temple showing the 'terrace' formation

Each flag is about two feet high. With these flags are five puppets-like images of the well known '5 Generals'. They are deities of War and act as guardians to the temple. In fact, they are found in all Taoist temples. Each General guards a cardinal point against evil spirits. North is represented by a general with the black flag, South the red flag, East the green flag, West the white flag and finally the center is represented by the yellow flag.

At the Tiēn Líng Gōng Temple, the altar for the '5 Generals' is not inside the temple but placed instead at the right-hand corner of the entrance. Inside the hall, the image of Shènwánggōng takes the center position on the main altar. Accompanying him are two identical images of Guān yīn, the Goddess of Mercy. Since there is only one altar in the temple, the long table and the dragon seat is arranged in front of it. The image of Tǔdìgōng (God of Earth) is as usual, placed below the main altar.

To the right of the temple, against the wall, is the rack for the weapons of the deities. Next to it stands many flags measuring 3 feet long each. To the left of the temple are many huge joss sticks of about 10 feet long each. These are used only on special and auspicious occasions such as festivals. At this temple, joss sticks and incense papers are for sale at \$3 each packet.

3.3 The Deities :-

The Shen worshipped in temples are represented by two forms i.e. in images and pictures. Images refer to porcelain statues resembling a deity. These are usually small and portable. Some of them are gifts from worshippers and grateful clients. Pictures refer to photographs and drawings of a deity. Sometimes a deity is represented by writings on red pieces of papers that are

framed. Examples of it are those of Tiēngōng (Heaven God) and Tǔdìgōng (God of Earth). Any image of a deity must go through a ceremony called Kāiguāng (開光) or 'opening of light'. This is the process of inviting the particular shen into the man-made image. Kāiguāng is done by temple mediums to consecrate the new images of deities which clients intend to set up in their new homes. Before the ceremony, a piece of red paper is used to cover the face of the shen. The dangki, in process of kāiguāng will remove the red paper signifying the presence of the particular shen.

At temples, deities are represented mostly by images. Normally, the most prominent deity of a temple has the largest image. He is also the one who usually possesses the dangki. However, at the Nán Tiēn Mén Temple, even though Tàshènyé (Monkey God) is most prominent, yet it is Sāntàizǐ Nǎzhā (the second in order of prominence) who possesses the dangki. Only in serious cases of consultation where help is required, Tàshènyé will take over. Certain deities do not possess a medium. Tiēngōng and Tǔdìgōng are two examples. The Jade Emperor who is the head of the Chinese pantheon does not possess a dangki. These deities are the more dignified shen and will not descend upon ordinary beings.

3.3.1 Legends :-

Sāntàizǐ Nǎzhā - Popularly known as the 3rd Prince, had two brothers named Jīnzhā (金吒) and Mùzhā (木吒). Their father, General Lee Ching served the Chou Dynasty in 12 Century B.C and later became the Prime Minister of Heaven. Nǎzhā's birth was considered miraculous because his mother, Madem Yen, was pregnant for 3½ years before giving birth. As he grew up, Nǎzhā developed magical powers so his father sent him to study with a Taoist priest called the Great Monad of the Mountains of Heaven. Nǎzhā

was rather mischevious and at 7 years old, he killed Prince Ao Ping, the 3rd son of the Dragon King (King of the Seas and Oceans). The Dragon King then declared war on his family. To save them from disgrace, Nazha committed suicide. He returned his bones to his father and his flesh to his mother as gratitude for his birth. However, his teacher sympathized with him and gave him life with waterlily stalks as bones and lotus leaves as flesh. For protection he was given a golden ring, a spear and 'wind and fire' wheels under his feet.²

Shènwánggōng - The tutelage deity of the Tiē Líng Mén Temple was believed to have 'shénkǔ' or bones of a Shen when he was still a child. In this teens he was believed to be summoned by Tiāngōng (Heaven God) to ascend to Heaven and resume duties as a deity. So, he climbed up onto the roof and requested that his mother bring him a 'Pu' (a type of pumpkin-like vegetable). His mother in the midst of excitement misunderstood and brought him a 'Gu' meaning a cow, instead. That is why it is believed that this worshippers need not be vegetarian. After becoming a deity, he decided to marry the Taoist priest's daughter from his village. When the priest objected to his daughter marrying a deity, she ran away to meditate in a temple. The angry priest tried to flood the temple to force his daughter out but was unsuccessful. Next, he tried to burn down the temple. Lying in a coffin chanting, he told his wife to life all four corners of the coffin with charcoal. Shènwánggōng disguised as an old man advised the wife against it telling her that her husband's chants may be ineffective and he would die in the fire. Quickly, the wife tried to remove all the charcoals but one corner of the coffin was already burning and could not be salvaged. Following this legend, the Chinese believed that is why in ancient China, all temples which

worship Shènwánggōng always caught fire at one corner.³

3.4 Equipment :-

Apart from the images and pictures of 'shen' many items are significant to the spirit mediumship in temples. Outside most spirit medium temples and sometimes at the roadsides (if the temple is way off the main road) are flags.

These are either black flags with gold print of the Eight Trigram or 'Bāguà' (八卦) or yellow flags with black prints. These flags serve 2 purposes. First, they are to ward off evil spirits and second, they are a form of advertisement informing passers-by of the location of the temple. Sometimes they serve to inform worshippers that a dangki is operating at the temple. For instance, the Nán Tiē Mén Temple is situated in Jalan Kolam Air which is off the main road, Jalan Ipoh. Thus, they placed a flag at the junction of the road.

Weapons supposedly used by deities are widely found in spirit medium temples. When a dangki is possessed by a particular deity, he will impersonate that deity and hold the weapon that is associated with that deity. Among the common weapons found in both the temples studied are swords, spears, rings and a broad knife-like dagger called Guāndāo (關刀). There are also other pieces of equipment used only for demonstration purposes on special occasions. These include prick-balls, nail chair, sedan chairs, knife beds and skewers. The dangki use these weapons for self-mortification. He swings the prick-balls with great force to inflict pain on himself. Skewers are used to pierce his cheeks or tongue using the blood for writing on the 'fu'. The various nails and sedan chairs are used when there is a procession of any sort.

The specific items used when a dangki is in trance for daily consultation are the dragon seat, whip, seals and fu. The dragon seat is so named because dragon symbolizes guardianship and vigilance. In ancient China, the Emperor's throne was known as 'The Dragon Throne'. Sometimes an Eight Trigram is painted on the Dragon Seat. This Eight Trigram is formed by placing the Yang and Yin into four possible positions one over the other, making all eight different forms i.e.

Ch'ien	(heaven)	,	K'un	(earth)
Kan	(water)	,	Li	(fire)
Tui	(moisture)	,	Sun	(wind)
Chen	(thunder)	,	Ken	(Hiu)

When arranged in a circle, it symbolize the evolution of nature.

To ward off evil spirits the whip is used. It is hoped that the loud noise caused by the whipping in the air will frighten them away. Each temple has a whip and also a seal of its own. Basically, the seal bears the name of the temple and some characters denoting peace. It also represent the authority of the shen.

3.5 Mediums/Dangki -

Schedule of the Mediums :-

There are two kinds of spirit temple mediums, one who operates full time and the other, part time. Those who are full time dangkis are normally temple keepers as well like Ng, the dangki at the Tién Ling Gōng Temple. He starts his practice in the morning at about 9 am and finishes at about 8 pm. On the other hand, a part time dangki like Tan, at the Nán Tién Mén Temple usually hold services at nights since he has a job in the day.

It is normal for a full time dangki to operate throughout the week without taking a day off, unless he has personal matters to settle. The

resident dangki usually live at the temple and it is convenient to hold consultations for clients whenever the need arises. On the other hand a part time dangki will not operate at least one day in a week.

3.5.1 Assistants-

Not all dangkis employ assistants. Assistants will act as interpreter for the clients who cannot comprehend the unintelligent muttering of the dangki in trance. Just as most temple dangkis are males, so are their assistants. In temples such as the Nán Tiē Mén where a formal organizing committee exists, the committee members act as assistants to the dangki. Sometimes assistants are members of the dangki's family. At the Tiē Líng Gōng Temple the wife and children of Ng, the resident dangki, assist him. Worshippers and neighbours can volunteer as assistants too. These assistants receive no monetary gains and need to observe the conditions of moral rectitude. They may need to fast or feed solely on vegetarian food on every 1st and 15th day of the month. If any assistant does not observe the required conditions, it is possible that something may go wrong during the trance, putting everyone present in danger.

3.6 Backgrounds of the Mediums:-

Tan (Nán Tiē Mén Temple):

He started operating some 12 years ago. According to him, he used to be a 'free thinker'. One day however, while walking past a temple in Jalan Raja Laut he suddenly went into a trance. When he returned home, he tried to figure out what actually happened and sought an explanation. That night (and for many following nights) he dreamt of the deity Tàshènyé (Monkey God). Even todate on every 1st and 15th night of the month, he dreams of the

deity. After some thoughts he finally decided to become a medium especially with encouragement from friends who helped to initiate him. After initiation, he performed only through invitations from temples on festivals. Now married and in his mid 30s, he has taken up the job of a part time dangki at Nán Tién Mén Temple. Otherwise, he is a canteen operator at a local school.

Tan had completed lower secondary education and received formal teachings from senior dangki and priest. He has in fact five sifu,⁵ one of whom is a famous Taoist priest from Taiwan named 'Yī Máo Tào Shī (一毛道士). This priest is said to own only a strand of hair which is long enough to be tied into a bun held in place with a porcupine spike. Incidentally, that is how he earned his name. The other four Sifu are retired dangkis from Malaysia. They had given Tan various scriptures and texts to read. Whenever he has any doubts, he will consult them. Tan travels all over Asia to render his services. It was in Brunei that Yi Mao Tao Shi spotted him and offered to tutor him. At present they correspond constantly and if the need arises, Tan will travel to Taiwan to seek his advice. Since his circle of dangkis friends is so wide, Tan normally invites them (other dangkis) to perform with him at festivals.

Ng (Tién Líng Gōng Temple) :-

Now 37 years old, Ng started practising 15 years ago. Originally a construction labourer, he used to work only as a part time dangki. Through the encouragement and persuasion of many clients, he eventually became a full time dangki. Since he lives in the temple, his working hours are rather flexible. As long as there are clients, he will perform his feat. Ng, who is married with four young children ranging from 4 to 11 years old together with

his family, feeds on vegetarian food twice a month i.e on the 1st and 15th day.

According to him, while asleep one night some 15 years ago, he was suddenly awakened and went into a trance. He was told by friends that the incident signified that a deity was searching for a medium and that he must have been selected. Since he was not interested in spirit mediumship, he considered the incident insignificant. However, he fell ill for almost a month during which he was often possessed by the deity Shènwánggōng. Eventually he agreed to become a dangki. After having recovered from his illness, he kept his promise and started his spirit medium practice. He believed that Shènwánggōng checks on all his activities and will know when he (the shen) is needed. Owing to that, Ng has a very simple process of invoking the shen.

Ng had spend some years in primary school and can only read and write a little in Chinese. For inscription on flags and banners he usually employ the service of other literate dangkis. Keeping his promise to serve the deity Shènwánggōng, Ng does not see the need to increase his knowledge in theology. He received no formal training on mediumship either.

3.6.1 Attitude :-

Most dangkis claim that they lend their bodies to deities in order to help solve worshippers' problems. Their main reason for accepting a fee is for the maintenance of the temple and their livelihood. Fees are kept as low as possible, usually \$2 or \$4. However, dangkis have different outlook on mediumship as an occupation. Some, like Ng consider it as a combination of livelihood and a way of serving God. It has become just an occupation. Others like Tan, are attracted to the subject on spiritmediumship. Tan's

interest in this aspect of the Chinese Religion compelled him to increase his knowledge on it. He reads widely (in Chinese) on this subject and holds frequent discussions with other dangkis and sifu. Mediumship is not just an occupation but rather an interest. Perhaps that is why he only pursues it on a part time basis.

3.7 Characteristics of trance :-

Both Tan and Ng are Hokkiens and will only speak in that dialect when in trance. Once they are possessed by their respective deity, they are oblivious of their surroundings but pay full attention to their clients. Their style of invoking the deities differ vastly.

Tan :-

It is usually Sāntàizǐ Nǎzhā who possesses Tan but other deities may do so on request. In cases where Sāntàizǐ cannot solve the problem of a client, his more prominent friends and seniors such as Tàshènyé, Jīgōng (濟公) or the Beggar God may be called upon to help. Tan will only be possessed by these deities in succession.

Since Sāntàizǐ is only a child Tan when possessed, speaks in a high pitch child's voice. Sāntàizǐ can appear as a seven or three years old child depending on his mood. If he chooses to descend to Earth as a 3 year old, he will ask for his milk bottle and refuses to move from his Dragon Seat. However, he usually chooses to come as the 7 years old Nǎzhā.

To begin the process of involving the deity, Tan closes his eyes and swirls his hand while listening to the chanting played from a tape recorder on the table. For convenience purposes he had resort to taping his chants or zhòu (咒). Sitting on his Dragon Set he wears a pair of yellow pants.

When he begins to tremble showing signs of the possession, his assistants quickly tie his hair into a top knot and a yellow apron-like garment called a stomacher (defroot 1910) is wrapped across his body. The stomacher is embroidered with the name of the temple and identity of the deity involved. To complete his impersonation of Sāntàizǐ, he wears the huge golden ring around his neck and sometimes across his body. He also holds other equipment such as flags or sword, depending on the condition of the case.

When he is appropriately dressed, Tan begins his trance by whipping in the air. Then he turns to face the altar of Heaven God (天公) and bows in respect. Next, he moves about dramatically following an imaginary 8 Trigram on the floor. Then he returns to the table and hits it with a small red wooden block of about 4" by 2". He hits 3 positions i.e. to his left, right and in front of him, to frighten away the evil spirits. Completing that he sits on the Dragon Seat and consultation begins. If the problem of the client is serious, he will get up, wait for an assistant to burn some incense paper at the entrance and starts his patterned 8 Trigram movement again. He then stops and stares into the burning incense paper. This is actually the report he receives from his subordinate of 36 generals who have been ordered to look into the case. It is in these burnt incense paper that Sāntàizǐ will find the solution.

When a change of deity is about to occur, Tan will turn to his assistants and inform them of the identity of the coming shen. As in illustration, here is a description of a change observed by the writer. Tan who was possessed by Sāntàizǐ told his assistants that Tàshènyé was taking over. Immediately, they removed the stomacher and replaced it with one that identified Tàshènyé. Then, with a loud bang on the table, Sāntàizǐ left Tan's body. He then sat

back in silence. Suddenly, with a jerk he woke up (his eyes were closed prior to this) and opened his eyes wide. He hits his head hard on the table many times before standing up and staring at the people around him. Tan's assistants quickly moved away from him in fear. Next, he sat down and in a loud booming voice, demanded to know the nature of the problem. Speaking in Mandarin all the time he did not for once blink his eyes throughout the consultation. Looking stern and fierce (contrary to Sāntàizǐ who wears a smile all the time) he demanded his sword. He jumped up and moved about dramatically. Finally with a bang on the table he threw his sword onto it and left. Tan then blinks a number of times and was soon out of the trance.

Ng :-

Ng does not dress to impersonate the deity Shènwánggōng. In his ordinary daily clothes, he either stands or sits when he is ready for possession. No chanting is needed as the deity is already aware that he is needed. Instead, Ng just light 3 joss sticks to notify Shènwánggōng that he is ready to be possessed. Once he trembles, the clients will recognize that the deity has arrived. To announce his arrival, Ng will whip in the air, turns to pay homage to the Heaven God (天公) and moves back to the table to hit his red wooden block. Finally, he will sit down on the Dragon Seat and begin consultation. Ng has never been possessed by any deity other than Shènwánggōng.

3.8 Consultations :-

Nán Tiēn Mén Temple - Since its dangkl Tan only 'loh dang' (落堂) or go into trance at night, there is a fixed timetable for consultation. The session starts at about 8 pm and ends normally around 11 pm (depending on the number of clients present). All clients are required to register with an

assistant and collect a number tag before consultation. For record purposes they need to supply their full names, exact time and date of birth. When a number is called, the assistant in charge of records will read aloud the information. This is to enlighten the deity on the client's background and nature of complaint.

Tiền Ling Gōng Temple - Since Ng is a resident dangki, there is no fixed timetable for clients. The temple opens at 9 am and closes around 10 pm.

On weekends and festivals, Ng is kept busy with his many clients. On some days, there are no clients at all. No records or registrations are required.

The reason of consultation can be classified into five main groups:-

1. Health - Clients seek advise on illness especially when an attempt by a doctor has failed.
2. Auspicious dates - Weddings and placement of an image of a particular shen at homes or any other special occasion that needs an auspicious date. This includes the process of kaiguang.
3. Misbehavior - Members of a family who do not conform to the moral teaching or deviant character such as involvement in drugs and gangsterism. Here the shen is seek to discipline them.
4. Undo charms - Where a person is being charmed, a dangki can help to break it.
5. Safety and security - To enquire about a journey that a client may be undertaking, exams that their children are taking, job interviews that they are attending or anything else that needs blessings.

In terms of praying for wealth, there are occasions where clients request for 4 digits through a dangki. However, this is rather infrequent. Usually a worshipper requests for 4 digits at his own home, from his household deities especially on auspicious days such as festivals or a deity's birthday. The service of a dangki is not needed here as the worshippers can use casting lots to obtain the 4 digits.

Most of the clients are given a 'fu' (charm paper) at the end of consultation. The fu is an important element of the seance. It is strips of coloured paper (usually in yellow or green) where a dangki scribbles on during a trance.

In serious cases, blood from the dangki's tongue is used for writing on it instead of red ink. The writing on the fu cannot be deciphered and are believed to be in God's language. There are four ways of using the fu:-

1. to be burnt in a bowl of water and together with the ashes it should be consumed.
2. to be folded into small triangular shape and wear it around the neck or keep it in pockets, wallets, under the pillow etc. In this form it is commonly known as talisman.
3. to be pasted onto doors of bedrooms or front door.
4. to be burnt and the ashes thrown into the water used for bathing.

The green fu is for keeping while the yellow, for consumption. To write a fu, the dangki will take 3 lighted joss sticks and writes in the air with it. Next he uses a whip to do the same. Finally he picks up a Chinese brush and writes a fu. It actually takes 108 strokes to write a fu but as a dangki's hand moves so fast, one can hardly count the strokes. Before dispatching the fu, the dangki will stamp 3 times on it with his seal of authority from the Shen. Sometimes, clients bring clothes belonging to their relatives to be blessed with the authority seal denoting peace.

3.8.1 Payments :-

Most clients put the fu into red envelopes (ang pow) before giving it to the dangki or his assistants. It is a polite form of payment. Generous clients will pay higher than the fee charged. Grateful clients may make cash donations or gifts such as banners, images of a deity etc to the temple. Many clients come to the temple without the necessary ritual paraphernalia. They know that it is for sale at the temple and consider the purchases as a mean of contribution to the temple. Tan charges \$2 for each consultation while Ng leaves it to the client to pay an amount he or she seem suitable.

3.9 Clientele :-

There are mainly 3 groups of people who visit the temples:-

1. Worshippers whose purpose is to pay homage to the shen (pai-shen).
2. Clients who seek consultations.
3. Regular patrons who are from the neighbourhood and turn the temple into a social meeting place.

3.9.1 Background :-

Most clients are from the Hokkien speaking group. It is the usual practice for each dialect group to frequent a particular temple or worship a particular shen. For example, in all Hokkien homes there is an image of Tābógōng (大伯公)⁶. The Cantonese speaking group tend to visit temples that worship Sān Niángniáng (Honourable 3rd Lady).

At Nán Tiān Mēn Temple sessions only begin at night and neighbours who had just taken their dinners will start arriving to meet and chat with one another. The regular visitors to this temple include friends of Tan, the dangki. A popular dangki can attract clients from afar. There, Tan's clients come from as far as Kedah.

At Tiēn Líng Gōng Temple many clients (about 80%) are from Ng's (the dangki) previous place of practice in Setapak. Prior to the present location Ng's temple was set up on illegal land in Setapak by residents there. When the rightful owner claimed the land, a generous client offered this present location as an alternative site. These former neighbours of Ng continue coming to his temple after he shifted.

The pattern of clients at both temples are rather similar. Majority of them are in the range of 30 to 60 years old. There may be a few youths around but they are either there out of curiosity or as companions to their elderly relatives. Women folks form a larger group of clients compared to men folks. Sometimes children below 10 years old are present at the temples especially if they are the subject of consultation (usually regarding their health).

A large percentage of the women who visit the temples regularly are housewives. In addition, majority of them are illiterate. Those who receive formal education were usually from Chinese medium schools. Only a handful of clients speak English. This English speaking group are more often male clients whose intention are to pray for wealth.

3.10 Communication :-

When in trance, the dangki is regarded as the shen who possesses his body. The clients will address the shen directly and converse with him in a straight forward manner. If the shen speaks in a non-comprehensive language, the dangki's assistants will help to translate the words. Clients normally sit at the table with the dangki. Waiting clients will be offered chairs at the portico or compound of the temple. Clients who are waiting for their turns

tend to converse among themselves. The common topic of conversation between them is the nature of their complaint or problem.

1. For the Chinese, marriage refers to a family.
2. There are instances where clients return for a second consultation because they were dissatisfied with the advice or fu given to them earlier. Others may return to thank the shen or the dangki for his successful help.
3. This legend was related by a friend's mother who is a Hindu.
4. Pr-3 talks about the "Tung" (Tung) and "Tung" (Tung) and used for the purpose of it is to know that the "Tung" will not be lost and the "Tung" (Tung) will be lost.
5. Pr-3 talks about the "Tung" (Tung) and "Tung" (Tung) and used for the purpose of it is to know that the "Tung" will not be lost and the "Tung" (Tung) will be lost.
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Notes on Chapter Three

1. For the Chinese characters refer to glossary.
2. Further details can be obtained from Camber, L.F 1958 Chinese Temples in Singapore. Eastern University Press. Another source is the Secretary (English Section) of the Nan Tien Men Temple at Jalan Kolam Air.
3. This legend was related by a friend's mother who is a Hokkien.
4. Prick balls known as 'Ting qiu' (Hokkien) are used for celebration purposes. It is to show that the dangki will not be hurt even if he hits himself with these weapons. Prick balls are round structure with sharp razor-like spikes.
5. Sifu are masters, teachers or tutors who train or advice the dangki.
6. Tābōgōng is a celebrated shen among Malaysian Chinese. His functions are similar to the 'God of Earth' (Tūdìgōng) with particular reference to the guardianship of an area where pioneers have settled.



PLATE 1 The Eight Trigram (八卦) Movement
by a dangki

PLATE 2 The dangki impersonating the deity Nēkō
complete with his weapons



PLATE 2

The dangki impersonating the deity Nāzhā
complete with his weapons



PLATE 3 The dangki holding a consultation (above)
and performing the Kāiquāng ceremony (below)



CHAPTER FOUR

THE PRACTICES OF TWO SOULRAISERS

Soulraising is a form of spirit mediumship which allegedly involves communication with the dead. It is known as Mǎngmeái (問 米) in Cantonese and Kāngbōng (康 寧) in Hokkein. It consists almost entirely of women practitioners called Mǎng Meái Phó (問 米 婆) in Cantonese meaning an old lady who sees to the raising of the souls.

Soulraising is not a very prevalent practice in Malaysia today. The few soulraisers who have a good reputation are always in demand. In Kuala Lumpur there are at least two practising soulraisers. They are located at Sentul and Selayang. Two others at Cheras and Jinjang were discovered to have left the profession few months before this study took place.¹

4.1 Schedule of Soulraisers

Soulraisers may adopt different timetables and styles in their practices. It is however a certainty that they operate in broad daylight before the sun sets.

The woman soulraiser at Sentul Mrs Chan, starts her daily practice as early as 8am and finishes around 6pm. Her counterpart at Selayang, Miss Yap, starts at 8am too but finishes earlier, at about 2pm. They are two examples of different working hours but it is almost definite that soulraisers in general cease to operate on specific dates i.e. every 1st and 15th day of the lunar calendar and also dates which consist of the figures 3, 6 and 9. The reason is unknown to them. They tries to conduct seances on those days but were unsuccessful (they could not go into trance). Therefore, soulraising is not conducted for 11 days in a month.

The 7th month of the lunar calendar and the Cheng Beng period are the busiest times for soulraisers. Souls of the dead are allowed to travel out of the Underworld on these times. The living take this opportunity to seek their dead relatives. For further explanation refer to Chapter Two.

Soulraisers rarely employ assistants except in giving out numbered cards to obtain order among waiting clients. At Sentul, Chan who lives in Kepong Baru (She was previously staying in Sentul) will only arrive at her place of operation which is a private house, just before 8am. She has a neighbour (at Sentul) to help her by distributing the numbered cards around 5am to 7am. Otherwise, Chan handles her practice totally on her own. Yap, the soulraiser at Selayang also manages on her own. She does not follow the numbered card system. Since she practises at home, her family lend a helping hand by simply greeting and inviting her clients to take their seats.

4.1.1 Background Of Soulraisers

Most soulraisers are elderly women. That is why the suffix 'poh' is often added to describe them, meaning old lady or elderly aunt. Soulraisers pursue this occupation mainly because they were selected by the supernatural beings (usually referring to deities such as Guānyīn). Chan:— Now in her 40s, married with four grown children, she can live comfortably without her soulraising practice. However, she was apparently selected by Guānyīn to serve the people and could see no means of escape. Normally, the selected person will be notified through incidences such as illness or tragedies. Many soulraisers do not undergo formal training for their job. To them, improvement comes with the experiences. Chan received no formal education and is illiterate. She did not study soulraising with any 'Sifu'. Although she is a Hakka but she can converse

fluently in a number of other Chinese dialects including Hokkien and Foo chiew.

Yap - In her late twenties, (one of the few young soulraisers) she comes from a middle class family owning a welding business in Selayang. She cannot consume meat of any sort and as a child, had become a vegetarian. Apparently, this would be Guānyīn's way of informing her that she was selected. It should be noted that not all soulraisers are vegetarians. Completed lower secondary, she did not study soulraising with any Sifu either. Also a Hakka, Yap has learnt to speak many other dialects through her clientele.

There is no need for soulraisers as well as their clients to observe any regulation before a seance. Those clients whose ancestral tablets are placed at their household altars may wish to light joss sticks at the appropriate altars, informing the soul of the dead that they will be visiting a soulraiser. This is not compulsory but is helpful to the soulraiser as the dead is prepared to be raised.

4.2.1 Settings and Equipment

4.2 Place Of Operation

Soulraising is not practised at temples. Soulraisers normally use their homes for such practices. Some of them may add a few more altars to their original household altar, giving the impression of a 'mini-temple'. At least 20 years ago, soulraisers conducted seances in the homes of the clients. Today, they find it more convenient and time saving to practise at their own residences. Chan operates in an old wooden shack in a squatties area of Sentul. She permits onlookers to observe the seances as the door leading to the living room where she conducts the seances is left open. However, the door leading to the room where the image of Guānyīn is placed, is locked. This is to prevent neighbours and friends from disturbing Guānyīn with their requests for 4 digits

to bet on. Yap stays on the first floor of a **shoplot**. Her family owns the shop below. She conducts seances in the hallway that is separated from the sitting room by a door. When the seance is in progress, the door will be closed, permitting only the immediate clients to remain in the hallway. This is to enable privacy between the clients and their dead relatives.

It does not matter if the soulraiser does not reside at the place of operation. The criteria of selecting a suitable location is the satisfaction of the tutelage deity. Soulraising is practised with guidance from a tutelage deity who is usually Guānyīn or Tǔdìgōng (土地公 or God Of Earth). If the deity is dissatisfied because the location is disturbed by the presence of evilspirits the soulraisers will in turn find difficulties in getting into trance. For instance, Chan who had shifted from Sentul to Kepong Baru wishes to practise in her new home. However her attempts to relocate the practice were unsuccessful.

4.2.1 Settings and Equipment

Though it is Guānyīn who guides both Chan and Yap in their practices, they do not have special altars for the clients to pay homage to the deity. Their household altars are for their families' personal worship and not meant for clients.

The soulraisers have various pieces of furniture necessary for their practices such as chairs and benches for waiting clients. Other appropriate items are a table with a tin of uncooked rice and an unboiled egg. Some soulraisers use small milk tins to fill the uncooked rice while other use larger tins such as glucose containers. The size of the tin is insignificant to the practice. The arrangement of the rice and egg is left to the individual soulraiser. For

example Chan uses a baking pan of about 12" in diameter where she places the tin of uncooked rice with an unboiled egg on the rice. The tin of uncooked rice serves as an urn for the joss sticks lighted by the immediate clients.

In the olden days where the soulraiser conducted the seance in the client's home, these two items (uncooked rice and unboiled egg) are a necessity to ensure the success of raising the soul of the dead. These items were placed on a table in front of the ancestral tablet. It is said that the rice and egg represented a meal, to be shared with the dead relative indicating that the intimate relationship between the living and the dead still existed.

Today, not all soulraisers choose to follow this tradition. Yap, for example do not use the egg to conduct the seance. Since soulraisers practise in their own residences, the rice and egg are supplied by them. These two items are permanently placed on the table and the rice is not refilled at each seance. Some clients prefer to bring their own unboiled egg but it is not a requirement.

Joss sticks and incense papers are available free of charge at the soulraisers'. Initially only joss sticks are required for the seance but if any difficulty arise in the process, the soulraiser will advise the client to burn some incense paper at the doorway as a means of persuasion.

Unlike the 'fu' that is given out by temple spirit mediums, soulraisers do not offer any material exchange. However, it has been rather common that a client requests 4 digit numbers from the soul contacted. These enthusiastic clients will usually provide a piece of paper and a pen for the 'soul' to write down the digits.

4.3 Characteristic Of Trance

Chanting

There are 2 kinds of chants for the purpose of soulraising, namely the Guānyīn Zhòu (觀音咒) and the Tóng zǐ-kú Zhòu (童子骨咒). The Guānyīn Zhòu is used if the soulraiser seeks the guidance of the deity Guānyīn. Guānyīn, the intermediate link between the dead and the living searches for the soul of the dead and also takes care of the soulraiser's soul while her body is being 'borrowed' by the soul which is raised. Requesting assistance from Guānyīn, her words while chanting are unclear except on occasions where she breaks into a song-like chant. When this occurs, one can hear the soulraiser mentioning the name of the deceased and that there are relatives present wishing to speak to the soul.

Tóng zǐ-kú Zhòu works along the same line as Guānyīn Zhòu. Here, it is requesting the assistance from 'little ghosts' called Tóng zǐ-kú. (Further explanation is available in Chapter Two).

The soulraiser will chant to go into trance. When in trance the searching process for the soul of the dead begins. Chanting is done in Hakka, the original dialect of the soulraiser. There are various style of soulraising. Chan:- She will break into a song-like chant after obtaining all information required from the client. In the midst of chanting, she may stop to ask the client further details regarding the sought soul or she may describe a soul and check with the client to ensure it is the correct one sought. When the client agrees that the correct soul has been contacted, Chan will continue chanting for a while longer. Then pausing, her voice will change indicating that the soul is raised.

Yap:- She chants so softly that it is difficult to hear the words. She will also ask questions about the sought soul between chanting. She quotes some information volunteered by a soul that is met during the search. For example, she describes a soul's physical appearance saying that the soul is tall, short, bespectacle, speaks gently or loudly etc. She repeats some parts of Guānyīn's conversation with the soul such as, "he said that he had four children of whom the only one is a son." If the client agrees that the correct soul is found, Yap will request that the soul be raised. She will then lay her head on the table and continue chanting. When the soul is raised, she will sit up again and in a changed voice starts talking indicating that the sought soul has been raised.

4.4 The roles of Guānyīn and Tóngzǐkú

There are different beliefs regarding soulraising. Some Chinese believe that the soulraiser is possessed by her familiar spirits (or of any deity whom she worships) and leads her own soul upward away from the phenomenal world into the heavens (Jack Potter 1974). Their destination is the Heavenly Flower Gardens. Along the way, the soul of the soulraiser will meet souls of the dead known commonly as ghosts (Guǐ 鬼). These souls take the advantage of this opportunity to communicate with the living relatives. They give advice, request for things (to be burnt for them) and ask for news on members of their families. The soulraiser has her own ancestors and dead relatives to serve as her familiar spirits other than her tutelage deity.

Guānyīn (Goddess Of Mercy) is often the tutelage deity to soulraisers. It is believed that when a soulraiser chants in a songlike manner, it is Guānyīn speaking and asking what is required of her. The soulraiser then asks that an audience be granted with a soul in Hell or the Underworld. Giving the information regarding the sought soul, Guānyīn, if she agrees, will pass the request

onto the keeper of Hell. Guānyīn is allowed through the gates of Hell and passes into a land where many suffering souls dwell. As she walks through, she is assailed by souls who demand to be put in touch with their living relatives. Eventually, she announces that she has been approached by or has met a soul whose appearance and behaviour fit the information given earlier. If it does not fit, it is obvious then, that it is not the soul which is being sought so Guanyin tries again. The procedure is repeated several times and on each occasion, the client is asked to identify the soul. When the correct soul is discovered, the soulraiser's voice and mannerism will change according to that of the soul raised. The client on recognizing these mannerism of the soul, will communicate directly with it.

Some soulraisers are assisted by souls of dead children. She calls upon the spirits of the dead children to act as the intermediaries through whom she contacts the more powerful deities on her altar. Sometimes the children's spirits refuse to enter her body as they are very young and playful. This is closely related to the roles of Tóngzíkú or Little Ghosts.

Soulraisers are said to bribe midwives to collect placentas for them. It is then put into a flower pot and covered it with soil. The soulraisers then grow bamboo plants or rather the plant that Guānyīn holds in her hand.² When the family of the new born baby celebrates its first birthday, the bamboo plant will be chopped off. That will kill the baby and its soul is stolen by the soulraiser.

The soulraiser then carves a face on the bark of the bamboo plant. To indicate the sex of the baby, the genital organs are carved as well. The bark is then hidden in the clothings of the soulraiser. During seances the soulraiser will call upon those little ghosts to assist her. These little ghosts are playful

and can be lured away from their duties. According to an informant, usually one can throw sweets or biscuits at a corner of the premises where the seance is held and the little ghosts will rush off to eat them thus neglecting their duties.³

4.5 Behaviour Of Soulraisers during seances

It is normal for a soulraiser to belch loudly in the midst of a seance. The belching can occur continuously. At times the soulraiser weeps claiming that the soul sought, is saddened by the sight of his living relatives. This is especially for those who died in tragedies. An example was the case of a young woman who committed suicide because she discovered that her husband was already married to someone else. His intention was to swindle her money. When he mistreated her after having taken all her money, she poured kerosene all over herself and burnt to death. Thus when her soul was sought by her mother, she wept helplessly, reminded of her pains and misfortune. (This seance was observed at Sentul where the soulraiser Chan, operates).

A soulraiser may vomit during a seance. This would supposedly happen if the soul of the dead is 'fresh' meaning the deceased had died for less than 100 days. As a result of vomiting, the soulraiser is left with discomfort for a number of days after the seance. Thus, many soulraisers admit that they are frightened of such cases. Fresh souls bring about a stench owing to the decomposition of their bodies. However, soul raising within 100 days of a death is considered the best time because the soul is still lingering in the world of the living during this period. The soul can be contacted easily. On the other hand, if a person has been dead for more than 60 years, his soul would be difficult to locate as he may be reborn into another life.

4.5.1 Seances

Before a seance begin, the client will need to light six joss sticks, three to be placed at the doorway while the other three, in the tin of uncooked rice.

Some soulraisers only require clinets to light three joss sticks placing it in the rice. The joss sticks are a mean of informing the soul that he is being sought.

After the joss sticks are placed in the appropriate places, the soulraiser and her clients will sit at the table. The clients will provide the soulraiser with information concerning the sought soul. Next, the soulraiser will close her eyes and chants. Sometimes a soulraiser may cover her face with a piece of cloth. The cloth is used because when she chants, she opens her mouth very wide and the cloth would spare her clients the painfully ugly sight of her distorted face. They are said to have 'hanging eyes' referring to the mesmerized state she is in during the seance.

In conducting a seance Chan will throw a speack of the uncooked rice and often gestures with her hands. The rice is essential for the contact with the supernatural. The tossing of rice helps the soul to identify itself. This practice give rise to the term 'Wènmípo' (問米婆) literally meaning an elderly woman who requests rice. Each time a soul departs, the process is repeated.

Yap has a simpler style where she merely puts her head onto the table and chants softly. When the soul is raised, she sits up and places her hands on her chin. No rice is tossed by her. She is conscious of her clients' presence and may interrupt their conversation to ask question or offer advice.

Soulraisers are fluent in many Chinese dialects. Conversation between the soul of the dead and its living relatives is in their own dialect. The soulraiser

may not speak a particular dialect before she conducts a seance yet she can converse fluently in that dialect during the seance. That, is the unexplained phenomenon of soulraising supporting its authenticity. Although some soulraisers claim that they conduct seances for other races as well, (speaking in the language of the client) soulraising being a strong Chinese belief is frequented almost entirely by the Chinese.

4.6 Objectives Of Soulraising

Clients who wish to contact their ancestors and dead relatives have various reasons to do so. The living still take an interest in the well-being of their departed ones. Many Chinese believe in the existence of the Underworld and are curious about the lives that their dead relatives lead over there.

Filial piety is one main reason for soulraising. Filial duty does not end with the parents' death. The children will observe mourning rites and these souls continue to exert parental rights on them. The children will contact these souls to obtain assurance that their parents are fine in the Underworld. This is a matter of great concern because if family spirits are not content and comfortable, their descendants will not prosper. Thus to a great extent, soulraising is done in view of the security and safety of the living rather than the dead.

Advice from these family spirits are often sought, concerning family matters. These include enquiries on health, family feuds, and wealth. A client may request for 4 digits and it is normal that the soul raised will oblige though some of them will advise the living against gambling.

Soulraising within 100 days of a death is done mostly out of a desire to

perpetuate cherished relationship. Clients of **soulraisers** are usually the closest relatives of the dead and are emotionally affected after the death.

4.6.1 Information required for the seance

The most important information concerning the dead person is the date of his birth and his death. If possible, the exact time of both events should be provided. The dates are of course quoted according to the Chinese lunar calendar.

An equally important detail is the name of the deceased. To avoid contacting the wrong soul as many have similar names, the name of the spouse (living or deceased) is required. Next, the age of the deceased when he died and his present age by calculating the numbers of years since his death, is required.

The place of burial is important too as some clients wish to contact their ancestors who were buried not in Malaysia but in mainland China. The burial grounds actually disclose the dialect of the soul. The Chinese burial grounds are divided according to dialect class. To speed up the search for the correct soul, the client can include the grave number or describe the location of the grave i.e. whether it is on the hilly part of the cemetery, facing the valleys, facing the north or south etc. However, this is not a compulsory nor important piece of information.

4.6.2 Theme Of Conversation

The theme of conversation runs along the same line as the reason for contacting the souls. If the client is there to enquire about the well being of his dead relatives, then the conversation will evolve around that topic. Questions relating to that aspect will be put forward by the client. As an illustration

here is an example of a conversation noted during a seance:-

1. Client - Daughter (D): Mom, why are you weeping? (The soulraiser was rubbing her eyes and sobbing).

Soul - Mother (M): I am sad when I think of all of you.

D : Don't be sad. You must take care of your health.

M : I cannot help it.

D : How is life over there? Are you alright?

M : I was sick for a few days last week.

D : Did you consult a doctor?

M : Yes, he said I had a fever and must rest.

D : Who accompanied you to the doctors?

M : My maid, who else? (It is customary to burn paper effigies of maids and butters during the funeral rites).

D : You must follow his advice.

M : I will. (Weeping once again) You have not come to talk to me for a long time. Why aren't my sons here today?

D : They are busy at work. Please don't cry. I'll tell them you wish to talk to them.

M : Yes, bless you.

The illustration shows that the client came solely for the purpose of knowing her mother's well being in the Underworld.

This form of reciprocity is common during seances.

An obvious fact is that clients tend to begin the conversation with questions regarding the background of their family. This is done in hope they can detect the validity of the seance and to be certain that the correct soul is raised.

The opening questions would be as follows:-

1. "Do you know who I am/we are?"
2. "Do you recognize us? Why don't you tell us who has come to see you.
(Normally the answer given would be in terms of relationship such as daughters, sons, wife etc rather than names. There are instances where names were used but these were mentioned in a rather unclear manner causing doubts and suspicion on the reliability of the seance).
3. "Do you remember where you passed away?"
4. "How many children have you got?"

These are the common questions intending to prove the identity of the soul.

Another common theme of conversation would be asking the souls of the deads if they need any specific items such as clothings or food. These items will be made from papers and be burnt for them if required. The usual item requested is incense paper or 'hell bank notes' as a medium of exchange in the Underworld. Offering of food such as chicken with rice or fruits are made as well. These food are consumed by the living after the rites.

Usually, the clients who offer to burn certain items for the souls, ask for favours in return. Some request for 4 digits to bet on while others request for blessings and protection from evil spirits. Sometimes those clients who ask for 4 digits will made promises of rewards if he or she wins the bet. These rewards include burning of paper effigies of houses and vehicles, or even food. This form of reciprocity is common during seances.

Though conversation is carried out on a personal level, physical contact between the clients and the soul in the body of the soulraiser is avoided. The soulraiser may gesture frequently with her hands but rarely will she reach out

to touch the clients. Some people believe that the body of a

soulraiser is cold during seances since her own soul is left in the care of her tutelage spirits or deity. Since no one has tried to verify this aspect of

4.7 Clientele
Clients are normally members of the immediate family of the deceased. soulraising, it remains unknown and ineffective as a way of proving the reliability of the soulraiser. Women make up the largest group of clients. Male clients are few and comprise hardly 20% of the clientele. Male clients can be classified into 3 categories:

4.6.3 Payments
1. the elderly or youth who accompany their elderly women relatives.

2. the immediate family of the deceased.
The amount charge for the seances is fixed by the respective soulraisers.

3. Chan charges \$4 per soul raised. She allows each client to request 2 souls to be raised. Each day, she hands out 16 numbered cards and each card holder is entitled to 2 souls. However, the number of clients she serves will depend on the duration of each seance. Normally it takes less than 15 minutes (i.e. before the 3 joss sticks in the tin of uncooked rice is totally burnt down). If it is common that the working class visit soulraisers. The upper and middle class group tend to keep away from such practices. This claim is supported by C. K. Yang (1961) who noted that people use magic practices not so much because of their proven effectiveness as because of psychological stimulation of hope and confidence at times when the best of human efforts was uncertain of success in surmounting a situation. He further stressed that the poorer the class, Yap charges slightly more, at \$5.60 per soul raised. She has no restriction to the number of souls each client wants to contact. The amount charged is not a round figure because she considers the practice as something that is 'ngm ho yi tow' (in Cantonese) meaning not good or holy. Round figures are used for auspicious occasions. Then again she may charge \$5.40 or \$5.50 instead of \$5.60 but she is not clear about the reasons of fixing the fee at \$5.60 and when queried, said it was fixed by her tutelage deity, Guanyin. No fee is charged by the soulraisers if the soul raised is discovered not to be the correct

one or if any attempts to contact the correct soul fail.

4.7 Clientele

Clients are normally members of the immediate family of the deceased.

Women make up the largest group of clients. Male clients are few and comprise hardly 20% of the clientele. Male clients can be classified into 3 categories:-

1. young boys or youth who accompany their elderly women relatives.
2. the husbands who accompany their wives to the seances.
3. the widowers who intend to contact the souls of their deceased wives.

Of the women clients interviewed casually, majority of them are illiterate housewives. Among the rest who are working, they are usually hawkers, and factory workers. Male clients are usually labourers or small scale businessmen.

It is common that the working class visit soulraisers. The upper and middle class group tend to keep away from such practices. This claim is supported by C K Yang (1961) who noted that people use magic practices not so much because of their proven effectiveness as because of psychological stimulation of hope and confidence at times when the best of human efforts was uncertain of success in surmounting a situation. He further stressed that the poorer the class, the more superstitious its members.

The women clients range from the age of 30 to 50 years old. Clients who are waiting for their turns are patient. They realized that these few soulraisers in Kuala Lumpur are in popular demand. Some of these clients are willing to spend a large part of the day waiting for their turns.

Chan, the soulraiser at Sentul draw clients from as far as Tanjung Malim, Rawang and Kajang. She had been practising for more than 10 years and has a

good reputation. However, it was rumoured that in recent years, she has become inaccurate in her predictions because a gang of extortioners splashed her premises with black dog's blood when she refused to pay them. Black dog's blood is a ritual item that can ward off evil spirits and supernatural beings.

The clients from outstation would arrive as early as 3am and spend the morning at Chan's premises talking among themselves to keep awake. This is especially true during 'peak period' i.e. Cheng Beng and Month Of the Hungry Ghosts. Some clients even bring light pieces of furniture such as collapsible chairs and portable mini stools or blankets. They came at such early hours hoping to be the 1st client as many Chinese believe that soulraising in the early hours of the morning is more accurate.

While waiting, clients tend to make friends among themselves. Since Chan's practice is rather open and public, there are always a crowd of onlookers. The immediate clients seem to have no objections to that. If an amusing conversation is taking place between a witty soul and his living relatives, most waiting clients and onlookers will join in the laughters. Similarly, if the soul is weeping helplessly, the atmosphere will be tense. As such, Chan's seances have turned out to be a sort of entertainment for onlookers. It is therefore not suprising to find the place packed with neighbours and curious onlookers.

Bored clients tend to start conversation with other waiting clients. The common topic would be the popularity of the soulraiser. Some clients are fond of relating their past experiences at a soulraiser's. They may recommend another soulraiser if anyone else wishes to check the authenticity of the seances. There are clients who visit a few soulraisers in less than a fortnight, to check their accuracy. Other prefer to keep to the same soulraiser. There

are also clients who discourage others from visiting a specific soulraiser if they have reasons to believe that the particular soulraiser is a fraud.

If a client is not satisfied with the way a seance is conducted or feels that the soul raised is not the correct one after all, she will not accuse the soulraiser openly. Many will just bear in mind that the soulraiser may be a fraud and not return for another visit. Others will complain or criticize the soulraiser behind her back and discourage potential clients from requesting the service of that particular soulraiser.

2. The bamboo plant is known to the Chinese as 竹 (Zhú) meaning 'Galangin's bamboo'.
3. It has been said that a soulraiser or any seance who uses these 'little ghosts' must care for them all her life. The crumbs from the food she eats must be given to feed these 'little ghosts' otherwise she may be harmed.

Notes To Chapter Four

1. There was a soulraiser in the Ampang area (she is no longer alive) who is said to practise soulraising in a different manner from others. Known as 'Guānsāngū' (關三姑) and not Wènmǐpóh (as the others are known), she did not raised a sought soul but guided the soul of her client to the Underworld to visit that 'sought soul'. Sitting on a chair in trance, she slapped her thighs continuously and the client with his eyes closed in a mesmerized state describe the Underworld as he was guided through it. When the seance is over, the client awakened, would not remember a single fact about his journey to the Underworld. (Source: A lady who had observed such a seance).
2. The bamboo plant is known to the Chinese as 觀音竹 (Guānyīn jù) meaning Guānyīn's bamboo.
3. It has been said that a soulraiser or any socerer who uses these 'little ghosts' must care for them all her life. The crumbs from the food she eats must be given to feed these 'little ghosts' otherwise she may be harmed.

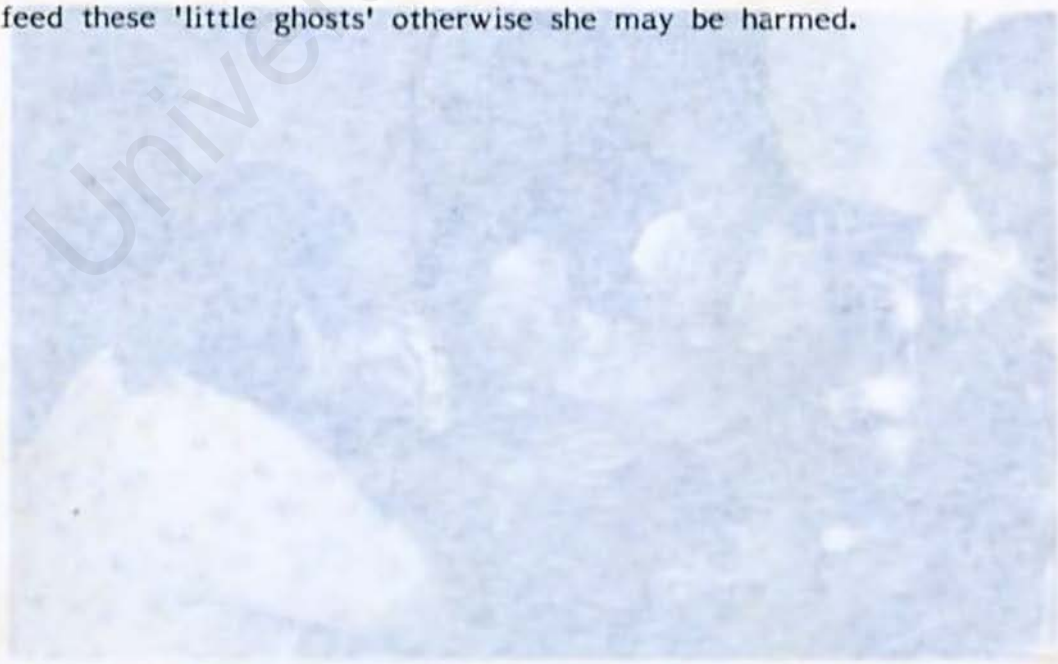




PLATE 4 (above) The Soulraiser in trance and searching for the sought soul

(Below) The 'Soul' and relative engaged in a conversation





PLATE 5 (Above) The 'Soul' counting the number of children he has (when asked)

(Below) In reply he answered, "I have 3 sons".



CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

It cannot be derived that the practices of dangkis and soulraisers are intricate parts of the Chinese Spirit Mediumship. From the point of view of the religious laity, both groups of mediums are considered to perform similar roles i.e. enabling laymen to communicate with the Supernaturals. These dangkis and soulraisers are religious specialists who use occult powers to perform different functions.

5.1 A Comparison

In comparing the practices of dangkis and soulraisers, we find that there are more differences than similarities between them. Basically, the first similarity is that the trance phenomenon and the seances require chanting as a mean of invoking a spirit be it a shen or 'soul'. However, the style of chanting and the type of chant (zhòu) may vary. For example, some dangkis use tape recorders to play the zhou or invocation while others prefer to chant personally.

Another distinct similarity between the two groups of mediums is the usage of ritual paraphernalia. Joss sticks and incense papers are almost compulsory for the phenomenon of trance. The dangkis use other ritual paraphernalia such as oil and during any celebration huge joss sticks are lighted. The soulraisers' usage of paraphernalia are limited to joss sticks and incense papers for their seances. These two items are considered very important for both practices.

Another similarity between the dangkis and soulraisers is that when possessed, they tend to impersonate the spirit which possesses them. For instance, a dangki who is possessed by the deity Nāzhā (the Third Prince) would be clad in the same attire as Nāzhā himself. A soulraiser too would adopt the

mannerism of the raised soul during the seance. Each group of mediums wishes to be closely identified with the spirit that possess them.

The differences are more obvious here. The main difference is that dangkis practise in temples whereas soulraisers practise outside the confines of temples. Temples are considered dwelling place for shen and dangkis operate in temples because they invoke Shen to help to solve worldly problems. Soulraisers provide opportunities for clients to contact their departed or dead relatives and no worshipping of any sort (except for some soulraisers who pay homage to their tutelage deities) is involved so they can operate in private residences.

Since soulraising does not involve worshipping of any kind, both the clients and soulraisers need not observe any regulation related to the practice. For instance, a soulraiser need not feed only on vegetarian food on every 1st and 15th day of the lunar month. Unlike them, the dangkis are guided by a set of unwritten moral rules. Clients are sometimes regulated too. For example, at temples, pregnant women are prohibited especially when a trance is in progress.

Contrary to that, at the soulraisers' pregnant women are free to enter the premises and can even participate in the seance.

Dangki have elaborate performances where weapons and equipment such as the Dragon Seat, seals and whip are necessary. In a trance, the dangki may perform feats of self mortification and during the trance he may speak in an unintelligent language called the 'Shen language'. Therefore, dangkis require the services of assistants and interpreters. The seances held by a soulraiser is much simpler. She goes into trance to enable the sought soul to 'borrow' her body for communication with the living. Since clients are relatives, the soul would speak in his mother tongue and no interpretation is required.

One final difference is that dangkies frequently dispense charm papers (fu) during consultations while soulraisers do not give out any item at all except for the occasional four digits that the clients request for.

5.2 The Nature Of Chinese Spirit Mediumship

From the data collected, it is clear that spirit medium activities are often associated with two social characteristics, i.e. class and age. Class bias is obvious as it is usually the lower class that is involved in these practices. C K Yang (1961) had this class bias in mind when he reasoned that the poorer the class, the more superstitious they are. Superstition in turn, lead to religious or occult practices. Age-wise, spirit medium practices have the mosot ardent supporters among the older generation. As Elliott (1955) saw it, it was usually the older type straits born Chinese women of the poor class who indulged in spirit medium practices. Conservative and illiterate, they cling tightly to tradition and a set of values which are closely related to religious beliefs. Today, majority of spirit mediumship supporters are still older women of the poorer class. However, this does not imply that members of the upper and middle class do not indulge in such practices. Many of them are seen at Chinese temples. They too, considered spirit mediums are final arbiters in solving their problems especially when other remedies from doctors or Chinese physicians failed. Worshippers from this richer class are known to pray more for health than for other purposes. There are some who, having being successful through the grace of Shen, continue visiting the respective temples as a mark of gratitude. Generally, immigrant Chinese who has reached a position of wealth from humble origins tend to retain some of their parents' characteristics in relation to spirit mediumship. Some how or other, most Chinese Religionists seem to have some association with spirit mediumship at one time or other, in

their lives.

Another distinct fact observed in spirit mediumship is the segregation of male and female roles. Spirit medium promoters are usually males while clients or worshippers are mostly females. These roles are interdependent since the male promoters depend upon the disposition of women who resort to divination when troubled. To obtain the solution that they seek, these women in turn depend upon the services of the mediums and promoters. In actual fact, men do believe in the efficacy of divination and spirit mediumship as well. They may not often visit mediums yet they are capable of sending their womenfold to seek advice on their behalf.

The success of a spirit medium cult depends upon a consistent record of cures and remedies that will in turn attract attention and create a favourable impression. Once a good reputation is built, there will be a constant flow of clients and worshippers. In terms of monetary gains, spirit medium practices should ideally be carried out without thought of such monetary reward. However, for the purpose of meeting their expenditures, spirit medium temples charged a small fee for consultation. These charges have brought about an accusation that spirit mediumship is of the nature of enterprises and rather business-like with the motive of making profits. Of course there are a few unscrupulous dangkis who are not authentic in their practices but they are only a minority.

Since only four mediums were studied, it is difficult to ascertain the popularity or decline of spirit mediumship. However, it cannot be denied that the Chinese way of life and trend of thoughts have been greatly influenced by traditional and religious beliefs. Such beliefs continue to influence them though many changes have been made to the system of beliefs as a whole. New cults

have emerged and many more sacred beings are added to the existing pantheon of gods. These new additions however, do not jeopardize the roles of the already popular deities. What is important is that a pantheon of gods still exists and in religious ceremonies and practices, the roles of spirit mediums remain indispensable. It is quite impossible for worshippers to invoke Shen by themselves. Thus, as long as a pantheon of gods remains there will be scope for spirit mediumship which is a vital part of the Chinese Religion.

5.3 An Analysis Of Its Popularity And Decline

"The still existing pantheon of gods suggests a continuity in the sacred order. Despite the subbranching of religious cults and systems (owing to the syncretic nature of the Chinese Religion) these different forms of cults continue to perpetuate the core of Chinese Religious beliefs and teachings" (Wong Keng Chun 1983).

Noting this, it is very likely that popularity of spirit mediumship is sustained. Though worshippers and supporters of spirit mediumship comprise the older generation, the younger generation also has an important role in sustaining these practices. The cultural background of a Chinese (regardless of age) is such that a sense of kinship and filial piety is deeply entrenched. Giving in to the elderly folks in their families, the younger generation consented to participate in religious practices. They are compelled to participate in rituals and prayer sessions as part of the family's activities. After a long period of 'half-hearted' participation, the practice which is handed down by word of mouth, imitation or observation becomes more or less a tradition. Spirit medium activities practised by their ancestors in Mainland China, followed by their immigrant forefathers in Malaysia, is still popular in this era. Little changes have taken place in the practice of spirit mediumship some 30 years ago when Elliott (1955) did his

research in this field. Yet, there are reasons to believe that spirit medium practices may be declining.

Wong (1983) had suggested that the consciousness of ethnical identity in Malaysia has in a way maintain Chinese religious beliefs. Contrary to that, the multi-racial environment in Malaysia is geared towards a common identity. Malaysian Chinese are encouraged to form a national identity with other ethnic groups and to think 'Malaysian'. This trend of thoughts is apparent as we see more Chinese Religionists being influenced by a newer perception of life. A new (national) set of values implies the breaking up of traditional ideologies and ways of life among the Malaysians. As a result, the role of religion in providing cultural identity among the Chinese has declined. The ultimate aim of achieving a national identity with a new set of values has diminished the role of Chinese culture in same ways. The lack of knowledge in the Chinese Language and understanding of Chinese Religion is becoming more apparent with the process of time. Other influencing factors that may lead to the decline of Chinese spirit mediumship and Chinese Religion as a whole includes modern education, and the trend towards secularization. The fact that education acts as a means of social advancement draws people towards a more secularized way of life. As society becomes more affluent and people became more educated, changes in attitudes occur. Spirit mediumship is said, best to succeed under conditions where the promoters can constitute a form of economic enterprise among people who have a predisposition towards such enterprise (Elliott 1955). In a community, which had achieved a relatively high standard of education, wealth and security, it is most unlikely to succeed.

In Malaysia, the younger generation are keeping away from religious

practices that are considered occultism. The promoters of spirit mediumship and the religious specialists including dangkis and soulraisers may be losing their merits and prestige as the general public view such activities with fear, contempt and ignorance. Yet, we cannot place all blame on modernization which bring about these changes. Modernization could bring an advance effect too as can be seen in the western countries that are considered 'modernized'. Many westerners are adopting eastern beliefs and values.

Elliott had suggested that it is possible that the theory of spirit medium may contain the seed of its own decline. Spirit mediumship is essentially an occult craft and in specialized branches such as soulraising, it is reputed that practitioners are often unwilling to reveal the whole extent of their knowledge to their students. Owing to lack of newcomers to the craft and decreasing knowledge that had been passed down, these spirit medium practices is likely to decline. Examples are a group of soulraisers called Guānsāngū who guide the souls of clients to the Underworld has almost become extinct.

Viewed in this light, spirit mediumship is ssen to be affected by variables such as modernization, education, multiracial environment etc. All these factors may account for the declining importance of it yet it should be noted that spirit mediumship still performs its psychological functions and able to draw clients especially from the poorer class.

Owing to insufficient data, it is difficult to take a stand as to conclude which direction spirit mediumship is heading in the Chinese society in Malaysia.

It is more apt to deduce that spirit mediumship in Malaysia is at the turning point. Perhaps in future, researchers will be granted a clearer picture to confirm whether it is declining or sustaining its popularity.

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